

# SPECIAL REPORT

## Marine Expedition to Haiti: September-October 1994

Capt John T. Quinn II

*Special Purpose MAGTF Caribbean conducted a well-planned and well-executed operation in a perfect example of 'operations other than war.'*

At a site only a half dozen miles from the final resting place of Christopher Columbus' *Santa Maria*, the colors of one of the U.S. Marine Corps' most storied regiments recently returned. As most *Marine Corps Gazette* readers know, on 20 September 1994, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Caribbean (SPMAGTF Carib), built around the headquarters of the 2d Marines, landed at Cap-Haitien, Haiti, as part of Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY. The task force occupied the city of Cap-Haitien and conducted limited operations in the surrounding region of northern Haiti until it was relieved almost 2 weeks later by U.S. Army forces. After remaining in reserve in the Caribbean Sea area for several more weeks pending the return of Haiti's exiled president, SPMAGTF Carib returned to its North Carolina home toward the end of October.

The most recent Marine expedition to Haiti had its origins in the American response to the deteriorating political conditions in the country resulting from the September 1991 overthrow of Jean Bertrand Aristide, its democratically elected president, by army commander Lt-Gen Raoul Cedras.

SPMAGTF Carib was organized on 20 July 1994 at Camp Lejeune for the purpose of sustaining the wide range of U.S. military capabilities afforded by the quick dispatch earlier that month of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations

Capable) (24th MEU(SOC)) to the Caribbean as the diplomatic crisis worsened. This type of afloat forward presence—although typically provided by smaller special purpose MAGTFs—had been an integral part of the U.S. effort against the illegal regime of Gen Cedras in Haiti since the fall of 1993.

The new task force, numbering almost 1,900 Marines and Sailors and with the Headquarters 2d Marines as its command element, was composed of a battalion landing team formed around the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines (BLT 2/2), Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-264), and Combat Service Support Detachment 29 (CSSD-29). It sailed from Morehead City, NC, on 13 August on board the USS *Wasp* (LHD 1) and the USS *Nashville* (LPD 13) and joined Commander Task Force 185.2 a few days later off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. En route, the task force relieved the 24th MEU(SOC) of its regional contingency responsibilities. Although similar in size and structure to a MEU, SPMAGTF Carib did not possess the unique assets or training required of the former before they are certified as being special operations capable. The SPMAGTF's commander, Col Thomas S. Jones, a veteran of the Vietnam conflict and the commander of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines during the 1991 Gulf War, saw the mission at hand as one being well suited for a more traditional landing force and thus not requiring these special oper-

ations capabilities.

Commanded by LtCol George S. ("Steve") Hartley, the reinforced 2d Battalion, 2d Marines—which had just returned from a 6-month deployment to the Western Pacific in early June—included Company B (-) from the 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion and Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. The mission of SPMAGTF Carib was not unfamiliar to LtCol Hartley, who, while serving as the executive officer of the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines during the summer of 1990, had commanded Contingency MAGTF 3-90 while it was stationed off Liberia to aid the evacuation of U.S. and other citizens during a bitter civil war. Because of the nature of the expected opposition in Haiti, the MAGTF directed Battery B to leave its M198 155mm howitzers at Camp Lejeune. The battery organized and trained from the outset of the deployment as a provisional rifle company of the BLT.

The SPMAGTF's aviation combat element was HMM-264, commanded by LtCol Anthony J. Zell. In addition to its standard complement of 12 CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters, the MCAS New River-based squadron included 4 AH-1W Super Cobras and 3 UH-1N Hueys from Marine Light/Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 (HML/A-269) and 4 CH-53E Super Stallions from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 464 (HMH-464). The fourth element of SPMAGTF Carib, the 200-man

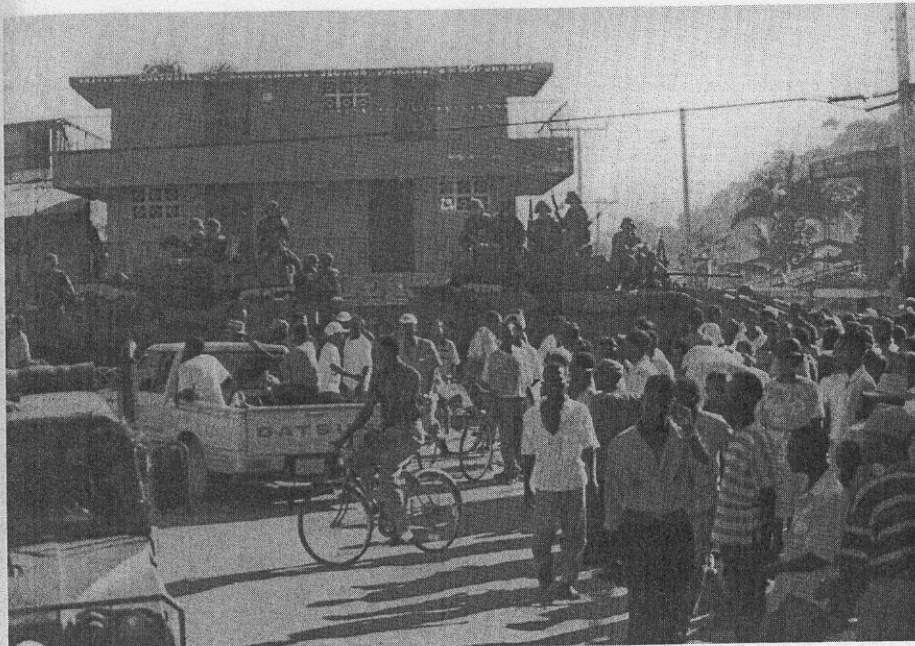


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*Company B, 2d LAR position in the southern section of Cap-Haitien.*

CSSD-29, was commanded by Maj Lance R. McBride. External attachments to SPMAGTF Carib included a detachment from the U.S. Army's 9th Psychological Operations Battalion, several liaison teams from XVIII Airborne Corps elements, and almost three dozen Creole-speaking linguists from throughout the Armed Services.

Col Jones and his staff focused initially on the execution of noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) either in the area of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince or in the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien. Nevertheless, with the possibility of a full-scale invasion of Haiti increasing as the Clinton Administration began to exhaust various diplomatic efforts to unseat the regime of Gen Cedras, SPMAGTF Carib departed the United States with the capability to conduct a wide range of amphibious operations. Prior to their departure, Col Jones and his operations officer, Maj Thomas C. Greenwood, attended an XVIII Airborne Corps brief at Fort Bragg, NC, that laid out the SPMAGTF's responsibilities if an invasion proved necessary. As the diplomatic situation further deteriorated in early September, it was toward the mission of forcible entry that Jones and his Marines concentrated their preparations and training. By mid-month they stood poised south of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in readiness for an amphibious assault on Cap-

Haitien on the northern coast of Haiti.

Veterans of the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, the 2d Marines' participation in the 1994 intervention harkened back to the "Banana Wars" legacy of the Corps' oldest regiments. In fact, for the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, the landing at Cap-Haitien was a homecoming to the town where its colors first flew. Some aspects of the operation, however, witnessed a departure from traditional roles. Foregoing the decades-old practice of pairing a Marine landing force with a specialized Navy amphibious staff, the Commander Amphibious Task Force (CATF) for the operation was RAdm William H. Wright IV, the commander of Cruiser-Destroyer Group 12 (CruDesGru 12) and Task Force 185.2. To leaven his staff with amphibious experts, Adm Wright merged personnel of Amphibious Squadron 8 (PhibRon 8) into his group, with squadron commander Capt Guy E. Myslivy, USN, serving as Task Force 185.2's chief staff officer. This unusual command arrangement took some getting used to, both on the part of the Marine staff, which was accustomed to working with a Navy staff fully conversant on amphibious issues, and the CruDesGru 12 staff, whose expertise was geared toward carrier battle group operations.

As last-minute preparations for the

assault proceeded, the amphibious task force gained temporary use of the USS *Ashland* (LSD 48), which had been in the area supporting the interception of Cuban migrants en route to Florida. This enabled Col Jones to reconfigure his initial waves for the planned landing at Cap-Haitien in order to better maximize his combat power ashore. Intelligence derived from advance force operations by Navy SEALs narrowed the choices for primary and alternate landing beaches, and national-level support helped confirm Haitian Army dispositions in the area. This intelligence was disseminated to the MAGTF's subordinate elements during a final round of briefings from 15-18 September.

In these few remaining days, Col Jones provided guidance concerning the rules of engagement (ROE) for his Marines. These rules had been formulated by the U.S. Atlantic Command over the course of the previous months, but with a seemingly endless series of minor modifications to the ROE throughout September threatening to thoroughly confuse the picture, Jones held off publishing them to the MAGTF until the situation became clearer. Along with the ROE, Jones made a point of emphasizing to leaders at all levels that the "hearts and minds" of the Haitian people were the ultimate objective of the operation at hand. He urged leaders to think about the consequences of their actions ashore, but to use force decisively if force was warranted. He cautioned them that the security of the MAGTF and of the residents of Cap-Haitien were inseparable, and that the best protection for Marines was for the local populace to know that they shared fully the benefits of that security. Lastly, Col Jones pledged that he would not second-guess the battlefield judgment of his subordinates.

Throughout the day on 18 September, Marines engaged in final preparations for the planned early morning assault. After the evening meal, they rechecked and then staged their equipment. Groups of Marines assigned to the initial waves began to migrate to their staging areas to hear last-minute instructions and to per-

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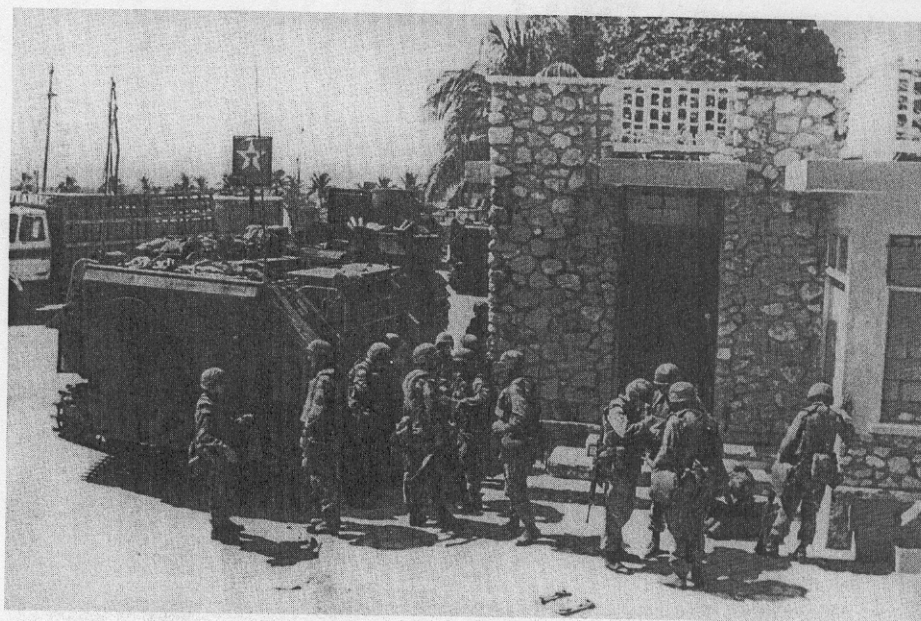
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haps catch some sleep. After sunset, SEALs set off for what looked to be a long night in the water conducting reconnaissance missions followed by the marking of beaches for the terminal guidance of landing craft and AAVs.

With only a few hours remaining before its execution, however, the nature of the operation changed dramatically from an assault to an uncontested landing and occupation of the objective area. This change resulted from an 11th-hour accord brokered by a team led by former President Jimmy Carter. As a consequence, a vaguely defined level of "cooperation"—rather than conflict—with the Cedras regime was the watchword under which U.S. Army and U.S. Special Operations Command forces were introduced into Port-au-Prince starting on the morning of 19 September. Much to the chagrin of members of the amphibious task force, the northern portion of the operation was held in abeyance pending the outcome of the Port-au-Prince landing. Courtesy of a Cable News Network feed from the USS *Mount Whitney* (LCC 20), Marines on the *Wasp* were further treated to the incongruous sight of the helolift of these forces into Port-au-Prince from the decks of U.S. Atlantic Fleet aircraft carriers. As this proceeded throughout the day without serious difficulty under the international news media's unblinking eye, the joint task force commander directed the landing of SP-MAGTF Carib at Cap-Haitien the next morning.

Col Jones used the additional time to reorient his Marines to the significantly altered circumstances under which the landing would proceed. New rules of engagement directed Marines to fire only if fired upon and to be sure of their intended target when responding in that manner. Ship-to-shore movement would remain as planned for the assault. Marines would go ashore "buttoned up" and conduct themselves with a demeanor that indicated firmness and a seriousness of purpose. In order not to give the local populace cause for suspicion of American motives, Jones decided to keep local Haitian military



*Marines from Company G, BLT 2/2 at a checkpoint just outside the Cap-Haitien port area.*

officials at arms length at all times.

The landing at Cap-Haitien on the morning of 20 September proceeded without incident. The local Haitian populace reacted positively to the appearance of Marines, although they tended to be quite subdued when Haitian military personnel or their suspected agents were nearby. Col Jones split his ground combat element, BLT 2/2, into three task forces for the initial phase of the landing. The largest, designated Task Force Irish, drew the mission of seizing the port area of Cap-Haitien as well as several bridges and intersections within the city. Task Force Irish was led by LtCol Hartley and consisted primarily of the AAV-mounted Company G, 2d Marines and Company B, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance (2d LAR) Battalion. Company G rolled ashore at 0700 on a small beach at the north end of the port area, followed promptly by the LAR company.

Concurrently, the second element, a task force consisting mainly of Company F, 2d Marines and Battery B, 10th Marines, was transported by HMM-264 to the Cap-Haitien airfield located some 3 kilometers to the south of the port. This force, under BLT 2/2's executive officer, Maj Herman C. Broadstone, was dubbed Task Force Hawg in acknowledgment of its commander's fondness for Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Both task forces were ably supported

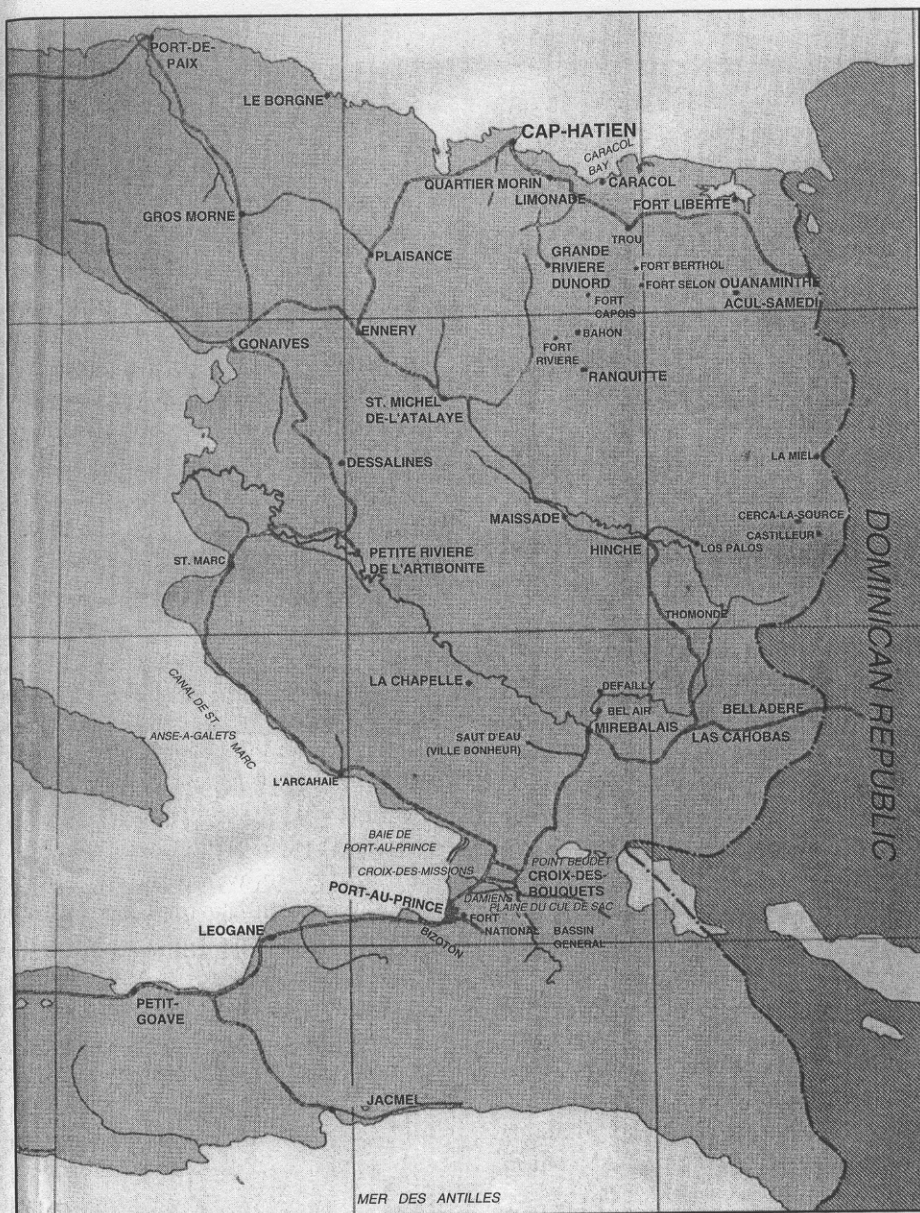
throughout the day by HMM-264 as well as OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters from the U.S. Army's O Troop, 4th Squadron of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment based on board the USS *Oliver Hazard Perry* (FFG 7). The third element of Jones' ground combat power, Company E, 2d Marines, was initially held on board the USS *Wasp* as the SP-MAGTF reserve, but by late morning Col Jones ordered it ashore to reinforce Task Force Irish. By day's end, BLT 2/2 was joined ashore by much of CSSD-29 and the SPMAGTF headquarters.

Accompanied by a portion of Task Force Irish, Col Jones immediately sought out the commander of the Military Department of the North, a Force Armee d'Haiti (FAD'H) lieutenant colonel named Josephat, and informed him of the strength of his force and his objectives ashore. The two commanders exchanged liaison officers, but Jones, mindful that the local populace should not be given the impression that his Marines were in any way supporting the Cedras regime, ruled out joint operations with the FAD'H.

Once the MAGTF secured the landing force objectives, its focus widened to include an initial assessment of civil-military operations requirements for the area. A host of basic civil needs confronted the Marines at Cap-Haitien, including severe shortages of medical supplies for

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the airport, utilizing both Company F under Capt Gregg L. Lyon and Capt Alvin W. Peterson, Jr's Battery B, 10th Marines on the perimeter. On the morning of 22 September, a Coast Guard C-130 made the first U.S. fixed-wing aircraft landing at the airfield when it delivered a team of U.S. Air Force air traffic control personnel to Cap-Haitien. The following day, a liaison and control element from the Air Force's Air Mobility Command arrived on a dozen C-130s to begin the process of expanding the airfield's capabilities to 24-hour operations.

SPMAGTF Carib's activities ashore in Haiti were limited to an amphibious operations area (AOA) roughly encompassing the country's Department of the North and its seaward approaches. The only significant violent outbreak during the Marines' time ashore occurred in the early evening of 24 September when a squad from Capt Diddams' Company E was involved in a brief firefight with a group of Haitian military policemen outside their headquarters. The incident started when one of the Haitians, clearly agitated by the presence of the Marines, drew a submachinegun on the nearby Marine squad. The platoon commander, 1stLt Virgil A. Palumbo, who had accompanied this squad on its patrol that evening, responded instantly to this threat and felled the military policeman with shots from his M16A2 rifle. In reaction, many of the Haitians scrambled for their weapons, which, in turn, caused the rest of the Marine squad to open fire. One sailor, attached to the squad as a linguist, was slightly wounded in the exchange of fire, while 10 Haitian soldiers were killed and 1 seriously wounded. The latter was medevaced to the *Wasp* for treatment.

In the wake of the firefight, the regime's authority in the north collapsed as Haitian military and police personnel shed their uniforms and abandoned their posts. Even a visit the next morning by Gen Cedras could not stanch the collapse, and he was forced to place a FAD'H captain in command of the department when neither LtCol Josephat nor his deputy could be found. With joyous

the local hospital, a lack of fuel for electric power generation, dwindling foodstuffs for local relief agencies, and an absence of functioning sanitation arrangements for the town. The MAGTF forwarded this assessment to the joint task force commander in Port-au-Prince, LtGen Henry H. Shelton, USA, within 3 days as required. As an interim measure, Col Jones directed immediate efforts to replenish the main hospital and clear garbage and debris from major thoroughfares, while the SPMAGTF executive officer, LtCol John D. McGuire, its engineer, Capt Randy J. Lawson, and its surgeon, Lt Charles H. Miller IV, MC, USN, surveyed longer term projects such as the partial restoration of electrical power to the city.

In response to a stream of reports

detailing the continued abuse by the regime's agents of the local populace, on the morning of 22 September LtCol Hartley sent Company E, commanded by Capt Richard L. Diddams, Jr., on an extended foot patrol of the town. After first stopping at a soccer field on the southwest edge of the town in an area known as Bel Air, by evening the company settled into positions at a school a few blocks to the west of the town center. Diddams dispatched squad-sized patrols throughout this part of Cap-Haitien on the 23d and 24th, complementing vehicular patrols by elements of Capt Robert D. Clark's LAR company and the HMMWV-mounted combined antiarmor teams.

Maj Broadstone's task force retained control of the northern part of



crowds starting to ransack police posts and FAD'H barracks, Col Jones directed LtCol Hartley, with elements of Capt Jay C. ("Colin") Smith's Company G stationed at the nearby port area, to occupy these buildings and prevent their weapons and stores from being expropriated by the populace. When Company G arrived on scene, many of those with weapons in hand eagerly turned them over to the Marines.

These events prompted SPMAGTF Carib to expedite a series of long-planned helicopterborne raids between 25 September and 1 October on outlying towns to secure FAD'H arms caches. The first mission, to the nearby town of Limbe on the afternoon of the 25th, yielded a bountiful supply of weaponry. The second, on the 26th, was to Grand Riviere du Nord, located 15 miles to the south of Cap-Haitien, and it produced similar results. The town of Grand Riviere du Nord was where famed Sergeant (later retired Brigadier General) Herman H. Hanneken served as a Gendarmerie Captain in 1919. It was at a site only a few miles south of the town that Hanneken with a few Gendarmes in October 1919 hunted down and killed Caco rebel leader Charlemagne Peralte. Hanneken was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for this action, and this event was commemorated by the naming of SPMAGTF Carib's area of operations (AO) after him.

The SPMAGTF conducted subsequent raids on reported arms caches at Le Borgne and Petit Bord du Borgne on 28 September and at Ouanaminthe near the border with the Dominican Republic on 1 October. The raid on the 28th came up empty, but the latter one yielded the largest weapons cache uncovered by Marines. In the wake of the raids, HMM-264 inserted U.S. Army Special Forces teams into the larger towns in the department to begin the difficult task of restructuring and training the Haitian police and military to support the development of democratic rule.

At Cap-Haitien, the MAGTF provided sufficient quantities of fuel to restart the town's power plant, which had sat idle for virtually the entire pre-

vious year. As a test, on the evening of 29 September power was turned on for a few hours just after sunset. This proved to be a very popular measure. Meanwhile, LtCol McGuire attempted to find a satisfactory local charitable or relief agency through which to distribute some of the task force's emergency foodstuffs and health and comfort supplies. Although some agencies operated in the area, many were reported to be tainted either through links to the regime or through the suspected diversion of donated supplies to the black market. Faced with this quandary and running short of time ashore, the MAGTF organized its own distribution effort in the city at the end of September. This effort was also quite well received, although the press of very large crowds at one of the distribution points prompted the use of pepper spray by Marines as a control measure and the site's eventual early closing.

With the arrival of advance elements of the Army's 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division starting on 25 September, SPMAGTF Carib prepared to turn over sectors of AO Hanneken to this force. The 2d Brigade, commanded by Col James M. Dubik, USA, a 1979 graduate of the Marine Corps' Amphibious Warfare School, was planned to consist of two light infantry battalions, a forward support battalion, a battalion-sized aviation task force, and additional supporting elements. The first of these units to arrive, the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry (2-87), assumed control of the airport and the southern approaches to Cap-Haitien on the afternoon of 26 September. Because the runway at Cap-Haitien airport was too short to accommodate Air Force strategic lift aircraft (work had begun several years earlier on its expansion but had halted midway to completion), the brigade headquarters and its initial infantry battalion flew in from Homestead Air Force Base, FL, on board Air Force C-130 aircraft. Once on the ground, they met up with their major equipment, which had been offloaded from a Ready Reserve Force sealift ship at the port of Cap-Haitien in the previous days after it was cleared of derelict or immobile fishing vessels and small merchantmen.

With the arrival of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry (2-14) from Port-au-Prince on the afternoon of 1 October, SPMAGTF Carib commenced its backload on board the *Wasp* and *Nashville*. Turning over the remainder of AO Hanneken to the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division on 2 October, the amphibious task force departed that evening for Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, for a thorough equipment washdown. After spending nearly a week in port, the force again set sail for the north coast of Haiti, where it remained in reserve until after President Jean Bertrand Aristide's return to Port-au-Prince on the 15th. The amphibious task force was released from the joint operations area on 17 October, and several days later the *Wasp* and *Nashville* disembarked SPMAGTF Carib at Camp Lejeune and Morehead City, NC.

Operations UPHOLD DEMOCRACY and SUPPORT DEMOCRACY provided SPMAGTF Carib the opportunity to showcase the versatility of the Navy and Marine Corps team. Although small in comparison to the Army-led operation in the greater Port-au-Prince area, the landing at Cap-Haitien involved many elements of interest. In particular, the prior lengthy involvement of Marines in this area provided much material with which to compare contemporary actions. Well suited to the demands of contingency operations, the MAGTF was able to quickly develop significant combat power ashore while retaining much of its aviation and logistical support afloat. This gave it a high degree of country-wide mobility that could have proven particularly useful to the joint task force commander if events had so demanded. Like many of its previous actions over the course of more than 200 years, the Marine Corps' participation in the September 1994 intervention in Haiti contained very traditional elements: a military expedition launched from the sea, at the direction of the President, that was limited in both its objectives and duration.

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>Capt Quinn is an historian at the History and Museums Division.

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